

*The Story of*  
**THE NEW YORK  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**



## CLASSIFICATION OF MEMBERSHIP

ANNUAL	_____	<i>Ten dollars per year</i>
LIFE	_____	<i>One hundred dollars</i>
FELLOW FOR LIFE	_____	<i>One thousand dollars</i>
PATRON IN PERPETUITY	_____	<i>Five thousand dollars</i>

Members receive the Quarterly Bulletin and Annual Report, and are entitled to the use of the library for reference work, and to invitations for lectures and functions held in the Society's building with the privilege of bringing guests.

## HOURS

### ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM

Open free to the public daily except Monday from 10 A.M. to 5 P.M., April to October, and from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M., November to March.

Sundays and holidays, 1 to 5 P.M., April to October, and 1 to 4 P.M., November to March.

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Building closed on New Year's Day, July 4th, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas.

THE STORY OF THE NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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THE NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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*By Way of Introduction*

The New York Historical Society is situated on Central Park West between 76th and 77th Streets. It was organized in 1804 to collect and preserve material pertaining to the history of the United States, and of New York State in particular, and is the second oldest historical society in the country. It is a privately endowed organization and receives no financial support from the city; however, it is open free to the public daily. In its building, which was completed in 1938, are housed a museum devoted to Americana, particularly relics of old New York; a large gallery of American portraits and other paintings; an impressive gallery of Old Masters; a reference library of American, and especially New York, history; a manuscript collection covering all periods of the country's past, and a comprehensive accumulation of maps, prints, and newspapers.

*What You Can See in the Museum*

Whether you are interested in some special phase of the country's or city's history, or whether you come out

of curiosity or to spend an hour's time, we are sure you will feel happier for having visited us because there are many things to attract your interest. You will probably want to see the furniture and balcony railing from Federal Hall, cradle of the federal government, at Wall and Nassau Streets, where George Washington was inaugurated first President of the United States; or the remains of the George III statue, and the headless and armless statue of William Pitt, both of which originally stood in New York City and were pulled down by soldiers of opposite sides in the Revolutionary War. You may also see the old Beekman family coach, used in New York from about 1770, and two rooms containing three original mantels and panelling from the Beekman Mansion at



Beekman Family Coach, c. 1770





Original water color drawing of the  
wild turkey by  
John James Audubon (1785-1851)

Turtle Bay, which was used as headquarters for the British commanders-in-chief in New York City, during the American Revolution.

Among the many association pieces to be seen here are Duncan Phyfe's tool chest; Washington's camp cot used during the Revolution and the desk on which he signed André's death warrant; a draft wheel used during the Civil War for conscripting soldiers which caused the draft riots in New York; a large punch bowl and companion pitcher from Castle Garden (now the Aquarium), commemorating the landing of Lafayette; a waistcoat worn by John Hancock; and a gown worn at the Prince of Wales Ball in New York, in 1860.

In a gallery devoted to John Rogers, the sculptor, are on view examples of practically all of his famous groups of statuary, including thirty-five of the original bronzes from which his plaster statuettes were cast.

A room is especially provided for 460 of the 500 original water color drawings by John James Audubon of the birds of America. The brilliant workmanship and realistic portrayal of the drawings delight all who see them, and a constantly increasing number of persons asking for them attest to their popular appeal.

New York views, to which several galleries and corridors are devoted, deserve mention. Scenes from the seventeenth century to modern times are shown, including many depicting interesting street life. Imagine cows at Bowling Green and pigs wandering about within a stone's



Tontine Coffee House, Wall Street, c. 1797

By Francis Guy (1760-1820)

From the Society's collection of original paintings of New York City views



Port of New York Gallery

throw of City Hall! Nowhere else can you see such a comprehensive array showing New York in all its periods.

The Port of New York Room, as its name implies, is given over to the maritime history of New York. In it you will find the model of John Fitch's steamboat, views of the harbor and pictures of the ships that entered and left it. Hudson River excursion boats, as well as ocean-going clippers and steamboats, have their place in this attractive gallery fitted out in nautical fashion.

Our Naval History Room and library together tell the story of America's naval encounters. On view are some interesting paintings and engravings of the more important engagements, a scale model of the *Monitor*, from which the ironclad itself was constructed, and some remains of Oliver Hazard Perry's flagship, *Niagara*.

In our military room you will find not only a collection of weapons used in the American wars, several early flags and a comprehensive selection of powder horns, but also a fascinating assortment of objects from the Revolutionary period, excavated by the Society's Field Exploration Committee, which for many years explored Revolutionary camp sites in this part of the country.

An exhibit which has always proved very popular is that of the Volunteer Fire Department. It contains four old hand-drawn engines, models of old apparatus, lanterns, buckets, trumpets, hats, shields and insurance plaques, not to mention numerous fire prints and views. Several rare pastels by Calyo of the Fire of 1835 are also shown.

Folk arts, a comparatively newly-recognized phase of the American arts, are represented in the Society by outstanding collections, in which are included early



Volunteer Fire Department Gallery



Apothecary Shop in the Folk Arts Gallery

American household utensils, such as a large hand loom, spinning wheels, earthenware jars, and lamps showing the development of lighting. The latter becomes the more fascinating when you realize that the Pilgrims, in 1620, were using the same kinds of lighting as the Greeks did one thousand years before, and that modern lighting has been evolved in the comparatively short space of the last hundred years. Splendid examples of china, glassware, pottery, toys, jewelry, wooden sculpture, kitchenware, iron-work, textiles, and a variety of furniture are also to be seen. The collection shows the beginning and development of American artistic taste, with its European background, the foreign portion of it being exhibited in an adjoining gallery with some of the more important examples of European paintings among the Society's Old Masters.

The European paintings, numbering 550, and representing almost all the early schools of art, consist mainly of gifts, presented by Thomas J. Bryan, in 1867, and by Louis Durr, in 1882.

On the top floor, you will find new galleries, where, in perfectly sky-lighted rooms are shown American portraits and other paintings. Among the outstanding works are Charles Willson Peale's Family Group, and a life portrait of Washington; Rembrandt Peale's Thomas Jefferson; a number of fine portraits by Gilbert Stuart, including one of Washington; John Singleton Copley's self-portrait; Thomas Cole's Course of Empire — his famous series symbolic of the rise and fall of a nation; St. Memin's Indian drawings, and excellent examples of the works of John Durand, Gerret Duyckinck, Pieter Vanderlyn, John Wollaston, Benjamin West, John Trumbull, Asher B.



Gallery of European Art



Durand, John Wesley Jarvis, John Vanderlyn, Samuel F. B. Morse, Henry Inman, Waldo and Jewett, Daniel Huntington, and others. If you are interested in miniatures, you will find on view a collection, by such artists as John Ramage, James Sharples, and Archibald Robertson. The Peter Marié miniatures of society belles of the late nineteenth century also occupy a prominent position.

There is, too, a good array of plaster and marble busts of notable Americans. The rarest and most famous of these will be found in especially constructed niches on the main floor. They are Washington and Jefferson by Jean Antoine Houdon, Benjamin Franklin by Jean Jacques Caffieri, and George Clinton by Giuseppe Ceracchi, rare examples by great sculptors. Worth mentioning, too, are the unusual porcelain and bronze statuettes of Washington, Franklin, and Lafayette, the bequest of Charles



Silver Bowl made in New York City by Benjamin Wynkoop (1675-1728)

A. Munn. It is interesting to note that most of these were made abroad, and while many of the porcelains are labelled "Washington," several resemble Franklin.

The Society's silver collection is a varied one. Particular mention should be made of a beautiful bowl by Benjamin Wynkoop, ca. 1700; a tankard by Cornelius Kierstede of about the same period, and the large silver salver presented to Captain Thomas Sowers by Governor Tryon and the General Assembly of New York, in 1773. Among the historical association pieces is the silver dinner service presented to Commodore Matthew C. Perry by the Chamber of Commerce and merchants of New York upon his successful negotiation of the treaty with Japan in 1854.

On the first floor is an exhibition of more than a dozen carriages used in New York during the latter part of the 19th century, including a victoria, brougham, gig, landau, tandem cart, vis-a-vis, phaeton, and park drag. With them is the famous road coach, *The Pioneer*, which ran between Holland House and Ardsley, N. Y. There are also six old



Part of the Carriage Exhibit

sleighs of varied types and two very early bicycles. Those devoted to the old days and ways will probably experience a sentimental feeling as they look at these reminders of an era that is gone.

*The Library — For the Student of History*

It is for its equally important, although less spectacular, treasures that the Society is best known to students of American history — the manuscripts, newspapers, pamphlets, broadsides, and prints, and the library of 200,000 volumes. The Society owns the best collection of eighteenth century New York newspapers extant, beginning with Bradford's *Gazette*, New York's first newspaper. Here you will also find a complete file of New York City Directories from the first one printed in 1786; an unusual collection of genealogical material; and an excellent local history section covering every state in the Union. The manuscripts include the Horatio Gates, James Duane, Rufus King, Albert Gallatin, James Alexander, Gen. John Lamb, Lord Stirling, Baron von Steuben, and Cadwallader Colden Papers, and 200 George Washington letters. They comprise the finest assemblage of documents in existence relating to the American side of the Revolutionary War, comparing favorably in scope with the collection of papers of British generals and statesmen who conducted the war in America, now in the possession of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. Also of importance are the original articles of Burgoyne's surrender; an orderly book record of Nathan Hale's execution; letters patent from Charles II to Edmund Andros, 1674, authorizing him to take over New Netherland from the Dutch Governor; Lord Cornbury's Charter to the City of New



The Library

York; the correspondence of the American Fur Company with its Western posts; and the manuscripts of Henry O'Reilly relating to the telegraph.

A special room has been set aside for maps and prints. Housed in it are over 100,000 engraved portraits; the Pach collection of over 700 photographs of distinguished New Yorkers of the period of 1867-1937; an unusual accumulation of broadsides containing many rare Revolutionary ones; political caricatures, particularly of the first half of the nineteenth century; and prints and photographs devoted largely to New York City scenes. The map division contains detailed maps of New York, including Bradford's map of 1731, the Duyckinck map of 1755, and Rutzer's map and view of 1767; the first comprehensive plan of Long Island, made by Ryder in 1670; the manuscript maps of Robert Erskine, geographer for George Washington during the Revolution, covering most of the original thirteen colonies; and atlases of many of the cities and towns of the country, including the useful Perris and Browne insurance maps of New York City.

The Landauer Trade Card Collection comprises letter-heads, advertising cards, broadsides, posters, and other ephemeral material relating to commercial products, and supplies a comprehensive source for American business, industrial and advertising history. It is of inestimable value in the study of those subjects as well as of events, fashions, and customs.

### *Publications and Lectures*

Aside from maintaining and operating its museum and library, the Society has issued over 450 publications since its first one, in 1805. From the John Watts De Peyster



The Assembly Hall

Publication Fund, one volume reproducing original source material from our archives is issued each year. A *Quarterly Bulletin* is distributed to members and kindred organizations, and contains a variety of articles mostly of New York antiquarian interest. Special volumes on American history and art have been published from The John Divine Jones Fund, and many miscellaneous books and pamphlets complete the total.

Lectures for members and friends are held periodically, and gallery talks are also conducted. The latter, in addition to relating the historical background of the objects on display, attempt to show what the present has inherited from the past, and how our contemporary viewpoints, attainments, and objectives have evolved and progressed through the years.

#### *A Short History — How the Society Began*

In 1804, New York was a prosperous little city of about seventy thousand people. It extended two miles north from the Battery as far as Houston Street. Greenwich was a village where, the following year, most of New York's population was to flee to escape a yellow fever epidemic. Thomas Jefferson had just been elected for a second term as President of the United States, and was to remain in office until 1809. Washington had died five years before: in fact, only fifteen years previously, in 1789, he had been inaugurated first President of the United States at Federal Hall. It was in this venerable building, then over one hundred years old, that The New York Historical Society came into being. On November 20, 1804, through the efforts of John Pintard (for some years Secretary of the American Academy of the Fine Arts, founder of New



Old City Hall (Federal Hall), 1798      First Home of the Society, 1804-1809  
*Original water color drawing by Archibald Robertson*

York's first savings bank, and among the first to agitate for a free school system) a meeting was held at which many of the town's prominent people, including Mayor De Witt Clinton, were present. A committee was selected to draw up a constitution, and by December 10, 1804, the Society was an organized group.

Early in 1805 its officers were elected, with Egbert Benson, a distinguished judge and patriot, as its first president, John Pintard its secretary, and John Forbes its librarian. It was more of a literary and natural history group at first, its chief function being to hold meetings at stated occasions, at which historical addresses and discourses were presented, but it was not long before the





EGBERT BENSON (1746-1833)  
First President of the Society, 1805-1815  
*By Gilbert Stuart*



JOHN PINTARD (1759-1844) Founder of the Society; Secretary, 1805-1819; Treasurer, 1819-1827  
*By Waldo and Jewett*

nucleus of a library, acquired in 1807 from John Pintard, began to assume respectable proportions. By 1813, when the first catalogue was printed, the Society was the proud possessor of 4,265 books, as well as 234 volumes of United States documents, 119 almanacs, 130 titles of newspapers, 134 maps, 30 miscellaneous views, the start of a manuscript collection, several oil portraits, and 38 engraved ones — no mean beginning, considering the nine short years of its existence.

That the young Society was indeed alive and well supported by its members was demonstrated by what must have been a momentous occasion: the celebration, in 1809, of the 200th anniversary of Henry Hudson's discovery of North America. The Reverend Samuel Miller, a distinguished clergyman of the day, delivered "a learned and interesting discourse, illustrative of this event, before a large and respectable audience of ladies and gentlemen, among whom were his Excellency, the Governor, and the Mayor and Corporation of the city." Thereafter the Society and a number of invited guests assembled at the City Hotel, where "an elegant dinner" was served, and no less than thirty-one toasts were drunk to celebrities from Christopher Columbus down to the then Swedish consul! This event so enthused the officers and members of the Society that they decided to petition the state legislature for endowment. In 1810 the petition was duly presented at Albany, and on March 22nd, De Witt Clinton, then a member of the state Senate, wrote that "the bill for endowing the Historical Society, and killing wolves and panthers passed the Senate this morning without opposition." The bill, however, was defeated in the Assembly. In 1814 another petition was presented, and

this time the Society was granted part of the proceeds of a lottery to be held for the promotion of literature and other purposes. In anticipation of the expected financial aid, a debt of several thousand dollars was incurred. This severely embarrassed the Society when the proceeds of the lottery failed to materialize. The books had to be mortgaged and were only redeemed in 1823, when Union College purchased the Society's interest in the lottery for eight thousand dollars.

In 1809, the Society and its collections had been moved into a room in Government House at Bowling Green, originally erected to provide a home for the nation's Presidents. However, when the seat of government was moved to Philadelphia, it was turned over to the city for other purposes. Conditions here soon became inadequate for the growing Society and better quarters were finally allotted to it in 1816 in the New York Institution, formerly the city almshouse in City Hall Park, but only after persistent efforts on the part of John Pintard. It was a rambling structure, some 260 feet long, three stories high, and with no claim to beauty. Into it the city ushered all of its institutions that were looking for a home with a low rental. Here the Society and four kindred organizations, the Literary and Philosophical Society, the American Academy of the Fine Arts, the Lyceum of Natural History, and Scudder's American Museum, found a temporary haven, for the annual rent charged by the city amounted to one peppercorn, "if lawfully demanded." The Society occupied two adjoining rooms on the ground floor with some extra space in the basement, and shortly afterward was given the use of additional rooms originally reserved for the New York Society Library, which had



The Society's Seventh Home, 1857-1908      Second Avenue and Eleventh Street

decided not to occupy them. Here the beginning of a mineralogical collection was installed, to which specimens of natural history were added by Dr. Samuel L. Mitchill, De Witt Clinton, and Col. George Gibbs, all zealous amateur students of natural science. In 1817, lectures on zoology, geology, vegetable physiology, mineralogy, chemistry, and philosophy were given, and the growth of that department began so to predominate over the real purposes of the Society that it was decided to present the

entire natural history collection to the recently organized Lyceum of Natural History.

General La Fayette arrived in New York in August, 1824, and was America's first national guest. During his entire stay, he was fêted and dined in every city in which he appeared. Although ticker tape had not yet been invented, New York was not at all backward in doing her share of the entertaining, nor was the Society slow in taking its cue, for three days after he landed, he and his son were introduced at a special meeting, at which time they were unanimously elected honorary members.

Although the Society was now twenty years old, its future was still insecure financially. A year later, its very existence was threatened by a seemingly insurmountable debt of seven thousand, five hundred dollars. Its doors were closed for nine months while a sale of part of its Collections was begun to raise money. Finally, through the generous act of the state legislature, a grant of five thousand dollars was made, which paid the Society's debts and saved it from dissolution.

Perhaps the sum in its treasury was not impressive, but the roster of names of its officers and members, from the beginning, most certainly was. Besides Egbert Benson and De Witt Clinton, the Society can list Gouverneur Morris, James Kent, Luther Bradish and Albert Gallatin among its early presidents. John Trumbull, the artist, Daniel D. Tompkins, governor of New York, and Cadwallader D. Colden, Mayor of New York City, George Bancroft and Henry Schoolcraft, historians, William Cullen Bryant, the elder J. P. Morgan and Cornelius Vanderbilt were at various times members of the governing body. President John Quincy Adams was the principal speaker at the Society's



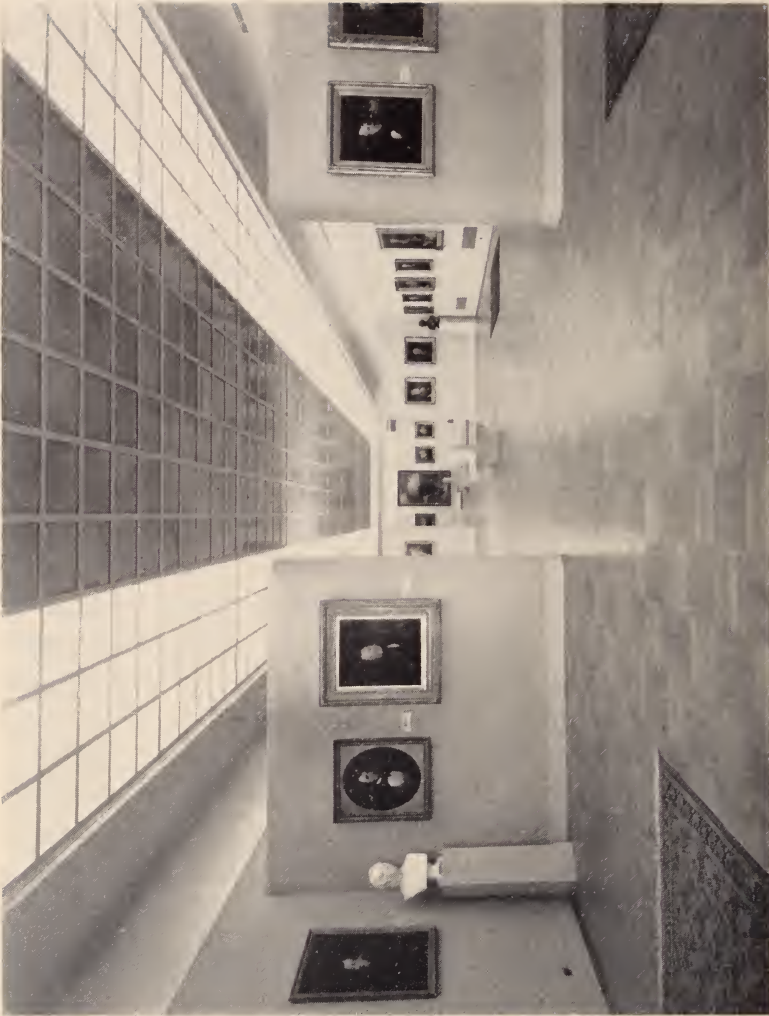
Art Gallery of the Society's Second Avenue Building

celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Inauguration of George Washington, in 1839, and such literary lights and public characters as Daniel Webster, William Cullen Bryant, Charles Francis Adams, Seth Low, and Justin Winsor were frequent speakers at the Society's meetings. The library was used extensively by men of letters as it was one of the few available repositories of historical information.

John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Charles Willson Peale, Timothy Pickering, Noah Webster, Washington Irving, Cyrus W. Field, Samuel F. B. Morse, Horatio Seymour, James Monroe, James Fenimore Cooper, William Dunlap, George Clinton, Robert Fulton, John Jay, Horace Greeley, Henry Inman, and Asher B. Durand were some of the more prominent members of the Society.

If ever an organization was in need of a permanent home, it was the Society during its early period. Several attempts were made to raise funds for a building in which to house its growing collections, but to no avail. By 1832, it had already been an occupant of three different city-owned buildings, and in the same year moved again, to the Remsen Building, at Broadway and Chambers Street, where the rent caused a new debt; in 1837, to the Stuyvesant Institute at 659 Broadway, an association for literary purposes, where the accommodations were free; and in 1841, to New York University in Washington Square, where both libraries were temporarily combined and made available for common use. While located here, the Society made another, and more determined, attempt to build a home.

A committee of nine was appointed in June, 1847 to raise fifty thousand dollars by public subscription. Five and a half years later, the total paid subscription amounted to only thirty-five thousand dollars. Despite this discouraging situation, a plot at Second Avenue and 11th Street, then the most fashionable section of the city, was purchased, and the building was begun with a cornerstone so large that, at the ceremony, its weight threatened to break through the platform. This, at least, was an auspicious beginning. Finally, in 1857, after a tedious and severe financial struggle, the Society moved into its new home, where it was to stay for the next fifty-one years. Almost at once its collections began to grow. America was becoming art conscious, and New York with it. In 1858 the entire collection of the New York Gallery of Fine Arts was deposited in the Society. In 1858 came the Assyrian reliefs, while two years later, the Abbott Egyptian collection was



Art Gallery of the Society's Present Building



added. Several years previously, Dr. Henry Abbott had brought his famous collection, the fruit of twenty years' work in Cairo, to America and displayed it publicly in New York. Attempts to sell it failed, and leaving it, he returned to Cairo, where he died in 1859. When it was learned that the collection was about to be removed to the British Museum, a public subscription was taken, fostered chiefly by Harvard College, and the collection was purchased and given to The New York Historical Society in 1860. Dr. Henry Anderson presented his small but choice accumulation of Egyptian antiquities a few years later, and in 1907, the Edwin Smith Surgical Papyrus, oldest scientific medical document in the world, arrived as a gift from his daughter. In 1936, the entire Egyptian collection of the Society was transferred to the Brooklyn Museum, as an indefinite loan, where it has been tastefully installed and is on public view. This is an outstanding example of inter-museum cooperation, and by augmenting the Egyptian material already there, has made the Brooklyn Museum's exhibition one of the three outstanding ones in America.

The Thomas J. Bryan collection of American and European paintings was presented to the Society in 1868. His gift was soon followed by a similar one from Louis Durr. Presented at a time when there were no public art museums in the city, the Society was fortunate in being made the depository. So it was that, within a decade, the Society acquired the largest art gallery of any institution in the city, and it is today still considered of great importance.

By the latter part of the nineteenth century, the building had become inadequate. Every available space was

occupied, and volumes were two and three deep on the shelves. Clearly, a new and larger edifice was needed. Prior to 1870, the Society had been offered free land in Central Park, between 81st and 84th Streets, where the Metropolitan Museum of Art now stands, but because of the great cost of the proposed building and its erection on city-owned property, the scheme was abandoned. But other projects were under way which culminated in the erection of the central portion of the present building in 1908 through the activity of a building fund drive, and the generosity of Mr. Henry Dexter.

The history of the next thirty years is one of continued growth. Soon the walls of the Society were again covered from floor to ceiling with pictures, while into every inch of space were crowded objects of all kinds, and books again assumed their former position of two and three rows deep on a shelf.

In 1935, the munificent bequests of Elizabeth Gardiner Thompson, Charles Griswold Thompson, and Mary Gardiner Thompson were received, and once more the Society looked forward to enlargement, but this time with adequate picture galleries, a huge book stack, and numerous exhibition rooms. An enlarged photographic studio was equipped to meet the many demands made on that department. Larger quarters were allotted to the bindery, for many years handicapped by lack of space, and a vault was constructed for the storage of valuable material. The auditorium was renovated and new seats installed. A painting restoration room, laboratory, carpenter shop, and sufficient office and other working space were provided. A special study of museum lighting was made, and its results incorporated in the completed building. Conveni-



Gallery of John Rogers Groups

ence and efficiency have been placed before pretentiousness, and the result is a completely modern museum and library, which will efficiently house the Society and its collections for some years to come. Provision has, however, been made for future growth by the purchase of additional property on 76th Street, which has been cleared and landscaped.

### *Collecting Activities*

The Society has always been interested in collecting not only material of historic importance, but also anything which in later years is likely to become so. It has been able to assemble unusual accumulations of all kinds because, through the years, it has been the first to preserve material that was not considered of value until some time later: for instance, the newspaper collection was begun as far back as 1813. When Jacob Bailey Moore, librarian of the Society, was sent to San Francisco in 1849 to establish the post office there, he mailed scores of different newspapers back East to his son, who had assumed his father's position. As a result, our newspapers include many otherwise unknown Western issues. In 1848, Dr. Nathan S. Jarvis presented a small, but now considered choice, assortment of American Indian material — dresses, arms and domestic implements of the Sioux and Chippewa Tribes — which were gathered by him while a surgeon in the United States Army during the Mexican War. As early as 1863, the Audubon water color drawings of American birds were purchased from the artist's widow. The first Egyptian antiquities to be publicly owned in this country came to our doors, as did the earliest collections of great paintings. The Society owned a display of American folk arts in

1911, long before such arts were commonly recognized, and it has recently added a much larger collection. The sculptured groups of John Rogers, once in every front parlor of the land, and then for several decades forgotten, now have a special gallery devoted to the most complete collection of them in the country. More recently, transportation has been added to the list with the acquisition of nineteenth century carriages.

Although the Society, through its long years of existence, collected often by a haphazard process as well as by design, the fact remains that because of the foresight of its past custodians, we of today are reaping great benefits.

EVERY  
CLASSICS



